

# OPEN AND SHUT?

Monday, October 21, 2013

## Let's be open about Open Access

To what extent should we expect publishers who profess a commitment to Open Access (OA) to be open in other ways too? This is a question often raised in discussions about OA. Some, for instance, argue (e.g. [here](#) and [here](#)) that OA ought to go hand-in-hand with open peer review (particularly in light of the recent "sting" of OA journals by *Science*). Others have argued that OA publishers have a duty to be more open in the management of their business. And it has been suggested that OA publishers should be more transparent about their finances. But what about when publishers make use of social media like blogs? How transparent should they be about who is behind the site, and what their objective is? This thought occurred to me recently when I was trying to find out who runs the *Open Science* blog.



Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons

Like companies everywhere, scholarly publishers have in recent years taken an increasing interest in the social web. Most, if not all, now have their own Twitter accounts, some have Google+ accounts, and most now run their own blogs (see for instance those run by *PLOS*, *BioMed Central*, *Wiley* and *Elsevier*).

In doing so, they invariably view the new platforms as useful new marketing tools for promoting their products and services — or in some cases as a space where their authors can promote their own books or journals (see, for instance, the blog run by *Springer*). Given these objectives, it is apparent to anyone reading or subscribing to these blogs exactly who runs them, what their purpose is, and the nature of the relationship they are asking readers to enter into with the site. If nothing else, the URL will invariably flag ownership.

But what if a publisher were to run a blog without indicating that it owned and/or controlled it? Suppose, for instance, that the intention was simply to provide a platform for discussing and reporting on a particular topic (e.g. Open Access). In such circumstances, could anonymity (or at least some degree of non-transparency) engender more productive discussions? In other words, might it be possible to provide a more effective communication platform if ownership of the site was cloaked in some way? Or would the interests of the site owner make it impossible to provide an independent platform?

These questions presented themselves to me in August, after I linked via Google+ to an article on the *Open Science* blog. Entitled *Green vs. Gold OA. Which one to choose*, the stated aim of the article was to outline the pros and cons of the two main forms of OA.

### Publisher FUD?

Almost immediately *Toma Susi*, a researcher based at the University of Vienna, posted a comment below my link, "What? The article is all wrong — in green OA the authors can keep publishing in prestigious journals, while gold OA is only available in specific new journals," he said. "Even if the writer is conflating hybrid and gold OA, it still seriously misrepresents green. Any idea who is behind this site?"

Another Google+ user commented, "To be honest, I found the article muddled on several points. Perhaps publisher FUD at work?"

After looking at a number of other posts on Open Science I had to conclude that (for whatever reason) the author did appear to work on the assumption that OA is synonymous with Gold OA, and that Green OA is, at best, a poor cousin. In discussing Green OA in the post I linked to, for instance, the text read, "The author does not have to pay APCs since we are, in fact, talking about self-publishing and the self-archiving of scientific papers."

Elsewhere, it read, "Green OA offers no mechanisms for promotion, and neither does it assure scientists that publishing in this model can serve their career in a

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Open Access: "Information wants to be free?" (A print version of this eBook is

available here ) Earlier this year I was invited to discuss with Georgia Institute of Technology librarians...



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Bauwens, the creator of The Foundation for P2P



Tweets by @RickyPo



Richard Poynder

@RickyPo

She Tweeted That Alan Dershowitz Might Be Acting Crazy. So Yale Fired Her. The strange free-speech case of Bandy Lee.  
[nymag.com/intelligencer/...](http://nymag.com/intelligencer/...)

6h



Richard Poynder

@RickyPo

Open access article processing charges Dataverse [dataverse.scholarsportal.info/dataverse/oaapc](http://dataverse.scholarsportal.info/dataverse/oaapc)

The State of  
Open Access  
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South Africa OA in  
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Timothy Gowers Harold  
Varmus Peter  
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Software Digital  
Preservation Dove  
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HEFCE Frontiers

measurable way.”

Since Green OA assumes that authors continue to publish in traditional peer-reviewed subscription journals, and then self-archive the final versions of their papers, this is completely wrong. And yet the same mistaken assumption seemed to permeate the blog. I had, therefore, to conclude that Susi was right to flag this as a problem.

By now I too was curious as to who was responsible for Open Science. Was it an independent blogger like myself, or was it an organisation dedicated to the cause of open science? Either way, why were there no ownership or affiliation details provided on the blog’s “About” page. This reads, “The OpenScience.com focuses on the subject of Open Access and related topics. The basic premise of the blog is to discuss all things related to OA: funding, OA monographs and books, Creative Commons, APCs, promotion of OA books, etc. OpenScience is also about Open Access news and information for those who want to publish in this model.”

Noticeable by its absence was any mention of Green Open Access, or self-archiving. This seemed to me to be particularly remiss given that – in the wake of the research community’s [negative reaction to the UK Finch Report](#) – many believe that Green OA is more urgent than OA publishing (Gold OA) today. And why was the blog called Open Science if it aimed only to cover OA, I wondered? (Although when I did a Google search on the term “open science” and noticed the blog came up in the first 10 hits, I felt I had probably answered my own question).

But I had still not been able to establish who was behind the blog. Going back to the site I noticed that below the description on the “About” page was the following text: “If you have any questions, please, do not hesitate and send me an email. I’ll make sure I get back to you as soon as possible.” The person referred to as “me” was not named, but when I hovered my mouse pointer over the hyperlink behind the words “send me an email” the following email address was displayed at the bottom left of my web browser: [kamilmizera@gmail.com](mailto:kamilmizera@gmail.com). (Later I realised that the author’s name also appears at the end of each post, although without any affiliation).

About ten days later my attention was drawn to a new post called, “[Is OA doomed to fail in HSS?](#)”. Once again, the assumption of the author appeared to be that OA was synonymous with Gold OA. He or she also seemed to assume that Gold OA always requires paying an article-processing charge – which is not true for the majority of OA journals. (Earlier this year Peter Suber [estimated](#) that nearly 70% of journals listed in the [DOAJ](#) do not charge an APC).

My curiosity as to who owned and ran the blog was now sufficient that I did a search on the name Kamil Mizera, which led me to [Mizera’s profile](#) on the web site of the Warsaw-based OA publisher [Versita](#). There his role was described as “Keeping company’s blog about Versita and e-publishing worldwide.”

A search in my inbox also threw up a message from Mizera that I had received (but apparently not replied to) last December. Mizera had contacted me in order to promote an “Emerging Scholar Monograph Competition” that Versita was then running – with the winner getting the opportunity to have their dissertation published as a book with Versita. Subsequently, I discovered that the competition had also been advertised in a [blog post](#) on Open Science – with no mention that I could see that the author of the advertisement was associated with Versita. (The [winner was announced](#) in March).

But it would be wrong to suggest that Versita completely hides the fact that it has a relationship with Open Science, since there is a link to the blog from the publisher’s [home page](#). However, there is no indication of this relationship on the blog itself, and so far as I could see the nature of the relationship is not explained on the Versita site – there is simply a link to the blog.

## Show me your payslips

In the hope of establishing the nature of the relationship, I [posted a question](#) on the blog. Three days later, Mizera replied “Open Science is affiliated with Versita and its aim is to promote open access as well as to educate prospective authors about funds and mandates and to instruct them on editorial process – be it about books or journals.”

When I did a search on the blog I could find only one mention of mandates – in [this article](#), which recommends that when introducing OA mandates, governments “should also specify that authors ought publish in the lowest-fee charging journals.”

Hoping for clarification as to what this meant in practice, I posted a [follow up question](#), asking also whether Mizera was an employee of Versita, or received any payment from the company for running the blog. I added, “I do feel it would help if the relationship between Open Science and Versita was made more transparent. Would you agree?”

Mizera replied, “I thought that we were transparent. But let me try again: Affiliated to Versita means – the blog was initiated and is supported by Versita as an independent forum for general discussion and exchange of news about OA in totum. What it does not mean, is that the blog is an extension, an appendage, a surreptitious partisan of Versita’s or anyone else’s interests, other than the

Alternatives, explained why he believes the var...



PLOS CEO  
Alison Mudditt  
discusses new  
OA agreement  
with the  
University of  
California

California

The Public Library of Science (PLOS) and the University of California (UC) have today announced a two-year agreement designed to make...



The OA  
Interviews:  
Taylor &  
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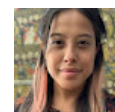
Medical Press

Please note the postscript to this interview here The open-access publisher Dove Medical Press has a controversial past and I have writ...



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Interviews:  
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in Basel,

Switzerland, the Multidisciplinary Digital Publishing Institute, or more usually MDPI, is an open access publisher...



Community  
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The Open  
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Publishing  
Group’s Srinu

Babu Gedela

\*\*\*Update: On August 26th 2016, the US government (Federal Trade Commission) announced that it has charged OMICS with making false claims, ...



Copyright: the  
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barrier that  
open access  
advocates  
underestimated

In calling for research papers to be made freely available open access advocates promised that doing so would lead to a simpler, less cos...



Robin Osborne  
on the state of  
Open Access:  
Where are we,  
what still needs  
to be done?

One of a series exploring the current state of Open Access

generic promotion — intellectual and practical, of OA as a new and positive form of scholarly exchange. My relationship with Versita is, in other words, that of support and independence, not any different to that of any university researcher — affiliated, supported by an institution but independent in words, ideas and deeds. OpenScience is my project, and every word in it (for better or worse) comes from me unmediated by any advice, prompting or qualification of any kind, from any quarters, save for the advice from one of Versita's bilingual staff. Should you find that troubling and were to offer to proof-read my sometimes Idiosyncratic English, I would be delighted. As to who pays me, Richard, you show me your payslips first;)"

In fact, not all the words on Open Science appear to be Mizera's — there is, for instance, [this guest post](#); and there is a [document](#) headed, "OPEN ACCESS FUNDING" linked from the strapline of the home page that has the by-line Emily Poznanski. Poznanski appears to be an [assistant production manager](#) at Versita.

Also linked from the strapline is an [article](#) entitled "How To Publish an Open Access Monograph". While the article is unsigned, a separate post [names the author](#) as Agata Morka. Morka's name also appears in a response to a comment posted beneath the article. Morka appears to be [Product Manager, Books](#) at Versita.

I was struck at Mizera's suggestion that his role is no different to that of a university researcher — "supported by an institution but independent in words". Is that a fair analogy in the context of the Open Science blog, I asked *de facto* leader of the OA movement [Peter Suber](#). Suber replied, "That's an honest and familiar model. However, university researchers are willing to say that they are employees paid by the university."

Since I still did not feel my questions had been fully answered, I contacted Versita. I got the following short unsigned response to my request for information, "Blog <http://openscience.com> belongs to Versita".

I followed up by pointing out that there was no indication on the Open Science blog site that it was owned by Versita, and that when I contacted Kamil Mizera he had said that the blog was "affiliated" with Versita, not owned by it. I also asked if Versita could confirm whether Mizera was an employee of the publisher, or remunerated by it in some way for running the blog.

I received another short unsigned reply, "Please be so kind to direct all questions regarding the Open Science blog to Mr Kamil Mizera who is its author and therefore is responsible for the content posted on the blog."

I persisted a little further, asking again if Versita could confirm whether Mizera was an employee, or remunerated by the publisher for running the blog. "Versita owns the domain name [www.openscience.com](http://www.openscience.com)," came a third unsigned reply. "As for the blog and its contents — Kamil Mizera is the author. He does cooperate with Versita but the details of this cooperation are not to be disclosed to third parties."

At this point I thought it might be worth checking the Whois record for openscience.com. In doing so I discovered that the domain is in the name of [De Gruyter](#), the Berlin-based legacy publisher, which had [acquired Versita](#) in January 2012.

## Conflict of interest?

I emailed the CEO of De Gruyter [Sven Fund](#) and asked if he could confirm that the domain was owned by the company. He replied, "I found the domain a while ago and secured it for our group, and I don't know what happened to it since then. I will find out about it and get back to you."

In a subsequent email Fund said, "I inquired about the status of openscience.com. I understand that your concern is about whether Mizera's position is a salaried one. I hope you will understand, we don't disclose this kind of information. However, it is true that the blog is owned by De Gruyter and Versita and our primary goal in supporting it is to promote Open Access as a publishing model, not a particular company. I hope this helps."

I was struck again at the emphasis on OA publishing, and the failure to mention Green OA, or self-archiving. As such, I could not help but wonder whether — if only in an unthought through way — the mission of the blog had ended up being aligned more to the interests of Versita and De Gruyter (both of whom offer pay-to-publish OA options) than to OA *per se*.

At this point I did a search on the blog for both De Gruyter and Versita. This threw up a number of hits, including [an interview](#) with a Versita author who, when asked about his publishing experience with Versita said, "[A]ll went quite smoothly. I don't remember any real problems in the publication process".

There were also promotional links to articles in Versita journals ([here](#) and [here](#)), a plug for a Versita book ([here](#)), a list of OA book publishers ([here](#)) in which Versita was placed in No. 1 position (above both Springer and Bloomsbury), and so on. And linked from a pull-down menu on the blog's header was a menu called "OA ARTICLES". This listed two articles, both published by Versita.

( OA ), the Q&A below is with Robin Osborne , Professor of Ancient History a...



The OA Interviews:  
[Frances Pinter](#)  
In 2012 serial entrepreneur  
[Frances Pinter](#)

founded a new company called Knowledge Unlatched ( KU ). The goal, she explained in 2013, was ...

## Blog Archive

[2020](#) (4)

[2019](#) (7)

[2018](#) (20)

[2017](#) (18)

[2016](#) (14)

[2015](#) (18)

[2014](#) (13)

[2013](#) (32)

[December](#) (1)

[November](#) (1)

[October](#) (4)

[Michelle Willmers on the state of Open Access: Whe...](#)

[Let's be open about Open Access](#)

[Elsevier's Philippe Terheggen on the state of Open...](#)

[Media research analyst at Exane BNP Paribas Sami K...](#)

[September](#) (5)

[August](#) (2)

[July](#) (9)

[June](#) (2)

[May](#) (2)

[April](#) (1)

[March](#) (2)

[February](#) (2)

[January](#) (1)

[2012](#) (43)

[2011](#) (22)

[2010](#) (20)

[2009](#) (22)

[2008](#) (14)

[2007](#) (9)

[2006](#) (27)

[2005](#) (31)

[2004](#) (2)



A Search on De Gruyter listed a number of mentions of a deal between De Gruyter and [Unglue.it](#) ([here](#) and [here](#)), and mention of a deal between De Gruyter and the [Max Planck Society](#) ([here](#)).

So far as I could see there was no indication anywhere that the author of the blog posts had a relationship with either of the two publishers, be it remunerated or not, or that De Gruyter is the owner of the domain.

I emailed Fund again and asked if he did not feel that since Versita and De Gruyter are mentioned on the blog quite often, without any indication that the blog actually belongs to De Gruyter/ Versita, some might conclude that there was a conflict of interest issue.

Fund replied, “You may know that I am responsible on the management team of De Gruyter for PR. I can assure you that openscience is not a PR channel for the company, I didn’t even know how we used it, when you approached me. In any case, I will make sure that we do not create any conflict of interest by talking to the team and sharing your observations with them.”

That was the last I heard on the topic from either De Gruyter, Versita or Mizera. I assume Fund did mention it to his team. The only mention of Versita or De Gruyter on the blog that I have seen since was in a post discussing Gold OA funds that Mizera [published on September 2<sup>nd</sup>](#), four days after I received my last email from Fund (August 28<sup>th</sup>).

However, when I looked at the blog just prior to publishing this post I could still find no indication that the site is owned by De Gruyter, or that it is run by someone [listed as being a member of Versita’s marketing department](#).

It is worth pointing out that when Suber used to write the [SPARC Open Access](#) newsletter there was [a strapline](#) at the very top of the newsletter that read, “SOAN is published and sponsored by the Scholarly Publishing and Academic Resources Coalition ([SPARC](#)).”

Likewise, when Suber ran his [Open Access News](#) blog, there was a prominent note in the sidebar that read, “[Open Access News](#) is supported by the [Open Society Institute](#), the [Scholarly Publishing and Academic Resources Coalition](#), and the [Wellcome Trust](#).”

I am not suggesting that everyone should copy Suber, but it is surely to be recommended that when a blog or website is owned or sponsored by a publisher, or some other organisation, then some form of disclosure is provided. Disclosure is not hard. It’s not embarrassing. On the contrary, the lack of disclosure is more embarrassing than the disclosure would be.

As it is, the lack of disclosure information on the Open Science blog seems likely to lead people to reach conclusions that Versita and De Gruyter would presumably not wish them to reach. When I went back to Susi to tell him what I had learned, for instance, he responded, “When you first linked to the Open Science blog, I was willing to give the author the benefit of the doubt, and assumed he was merely uninformed and ignorant about all the – by now mainstream – discussions concerning open access. I did not even consider the domain issue. Now I can only conclude that this is a blog with a hidden agenda, sitting on a domain that it should not by rights occupy.”

He added, “The evasive answers provided by Mizera and Fund are incredible. It actually doesn’t matter whether Fund or anyone else at De Gruyter or Versita had knowledge of Mizera’s work beforehand – their answers and inaction implicate them after the fact. Do they really think that it is in De Gruyter’s best interests to act in this way in a post-[RWA](#) world?”

## This is laughable

There is a coda to the story. On 17<sup>th</sup> September I posted [an interview](#) I had done with Sven Fund on my blog. Five days later I was copied into a [tweet](#) by the Open Science Federation ([OSF](#)) pointing out that they had tried to buy the openscience.com domain, but had been outbid by De Gruyter.

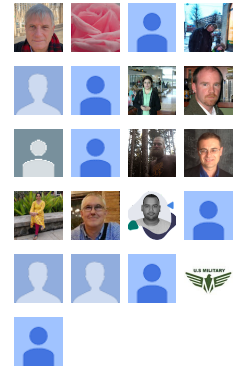
It appears that the domain was sold to De Gruyter by [Steve Mann](#), a researcher and inventor – and self-styled “father of wearable computing” – based at Toronto University. If I am reading the Whois record correctly, the change of ownership took place in [January 2012](#), around the time that De Gruyter [acquired Versita](#). The Open Science blog appears to have gone live in [July 2012](#).

As noted earlier, we should not conclude that Versita and De Gruyter have deliberately hidden their ownership of the blog. As founder of OSF [Brian Glanz](#) pointed out when I followed up the OSF tweet. “Versita happily represents openscience.com as one of their efforts, on their home page. Their Twitter accounts have linked often to openscience.com and made their association clear. And check the Whois on openscience.com – it’s easy to keep private, but De Gruyter did not hide their ownership.”

As also noted earlier, however, there is no indication on the blog itself that it is owned by De Gruyter. Moreover, when I explained to Glanz that Fund was responsible on the management team of De Gruyter for PR, and that he had not known what the blog was being used for, Glanz pointed me to the web page of

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924 Pageviews  
Dec. 01st - Dec. 31st



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Versita's marketing team (which lists four employees, including Mizera) and commented, "Fund is responsible for PR but does not know what the Marketing team are doing with Versita.com, openscience.com, and their social media? Could their internal communications be so dysfunctional?"

He added, "We are apparently not talking about a large organization. Do their PR head and their marketing team meet once a year? Is no one other than Fund permitted to speak at the meeting? Sorry, but this is laughable. How could Fund have an honest perception that openscience.com is not a PR channel?"

In fact, it was not entirely clear whether Fund was referring to Versita or De Gruyter (or both companies) when he said he was responsible for PR. But whatever he meant, we must surely wonder why Open Science still gives no indication of its relationship with either Versita or De Gruyter. Why did no one act to prevent further confusion or concern about transparency immediately after I raised the issue more than two months ago? (I first contacted Versita on 16th August and De Gruyter on 23rd August).

## Meaningful olive branch

As we also pointed out, Open Access (both Green and Gold) is no more than a small subset of the larger topic of [Open Science](#) — so the name of the blog is not an accurate description of what it covers. This is presumably the point that Susi makes when he says that the blog should not by rights be occupying the domain name openscience.com.

For this reason, some might conclude that it would be better if the domain was in the control of a group or organisation devoted to the topic of open science, rather than a company seeking — in the words of Fund — to "promote open access as a publishing model".

This is certainly what Glanz would like to see: "I wish the Open Science community could use openscience.com," he told me. "I haven't read every word of the blog there, but it appeared the blogger discusses only Open Access, not Open Science. Off the cuff: I can see on my phone right now that openaccess.com is not being used, it's for sale by Taiki Matsuura — seems he regularly resells domains."

Glanz added "Perhaps De Gruyter would consider trading in for another domain! Access is not all of Open Science, nor for that matter is science all of Open Access. It would be better than openaccess.com or openscience.com though, in light of the blogger's bungling of the effort, if they moved the blog to openaccess.versita.com or the like, for transparency's sake. Gifting the domain openscience.com to the Open Science community would be a meaningful olive branch."

Given that neither Mizera, Versita, nor De Gruyter appear to believe there is any need to extend an olive branch to anyone, or any necessity to reveal whether or not Mizera is remunerated by either company for his work, such a gesture seems highly improbable.

This situation could, of course, have been avoided if Steve Mann had sold the domain to the non-profit alliance Open Science Federation in the first place, rather than to a legacy publisher that belongs to an organisation that [actively lobbies against Open Access](#).

Mann did not respond to my emails about the sale. We could, however, note that his work relies on open source software and hardware. We could also note that in 2000 he [wrote](#), "As we build cyberspace, it is up to us, as individuals, not to promote illiteracy and proprietary standards that shut out those who fail to purchase computer programs from a specific vendor."

It seems to me that the two larger issues arising from this story are the following: First, even if he or she is not remunerated for the work, can someone who is a member of an OA publisher's marketing team, and listed as the company's official blogger, be expected to run a blog owned by that publisher in an objective manner when dealing with a topic as controversial as Open Access?

Second, if a publisher has made a commitment to Open Access should we expect it to make a concomitant commitment to transparency in the way that it communicates with the world? I suspect many in the research community would argue that it should. As [Joseph Esposito](#) [put it](#) earlier this year when commenting on the lack of explanation as to why both the CEO and COO of OA publisher [Public Library of Science](#) had suddenly and mysteriously left the company, "Let's be open about open access."

\*\*\*UPDATE\*\*\*

TWO DAYS AFTER THIS POST WAS PUBLISHED THE FOLLOWING TEXT WAS ADDED TO THE [ABOUT PAGE](#) OF THE OPEN SCIENCE BLOG:

"OPEN SCIENCE BELONGS TO VERSITA"

### 3 comments:



**Stevan Harnad** said...

**WHATISINANAME.whocares?**

openscience.COM is virtually a contradiction in terms.

and who wants a .com (commerce) domain name for Open Science (whatever it means)?

what's wrong with [openscience.org](http://openscience.org) (q.v.)?

and who cares about the buzzword.anything anyway? Call the URL whatever you like (but make it short): we're not selling a product...

Equating OA with Gold OA (and ignoring or minimizing Green OA) is of course a long-standing problem of OA, on both sides of the divide: The publishing community does it out of self-interest; the research community does it out of ignorance. The difference is that publishers gain from the confusion, and researchers lose.

But of course, transparency is the only honest route.

October 21, 2013 3:38 pm

**Anonymous** said...

An interesting read, and I agree that education and further transparency are the only fair and honest ways to help authors make an informed choice for their work(s).

October 21, 2013 5:07 pm

**Anonymous** said...

Excellent article! We need more of this kind of work all over the web.

I wonder if you were aware of, and might be interested in, extending SourceWatch with this new-found knowledge ([sourcewatch.org](http://sourcewatch.org)). Or perhaps the scholarly publishing industry and the open access movement has need of a separate, similarly focussed resource?

October 22, 2013 6:27 am

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